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# GLOBALIZATION AND UNIPOLARITY

Walking the Tightrope

There will be no 'there' anymore. We will all be here.

—MCI Telecommunication advertisement

#### GIRISH LUTHRA CAPTAIN, INDIAN NAVY

Alternate grand strategies under discussion in the United States since the end of the Cold War have grappled with concurrent realities of globalization and unipolarity. Various models have been put forward to examine relative dividends in the future strategic environment, with equal concern but unequal emphasis on stability in this uncertain environment. There is a recognition of an abiding tension between globalization and unipolarity, and primacists highlight that the leading role of the United States is the common denominator and that globalization needs to be handled upfront without succumbing to any multilateralism. The sustenance, indeed enhancement, of the imbalance of power in the last decade has prompted many to suggest strategies to extend the moment of unipolarity. Critics, however, argue that such an approach is flawed in its assumptions and doomed in the long run given the emerging environment.

This dichotomy cannot help but beg the question of the risk of the co-existence of unipolarity and globalization on the potential of conflict in this shrinking (or shrunk?) world. While the ability of the U.S. to use 'carrot' as well as 'stick' has increased manifold, the direction of its usage has become hazy due to globalization. Any future strategy, therefore, must translate power into effectiveness. The notion of absolute and relative power equates well with influence in a unipolar world but the ability to control the outcome of this influence is at best debatable. Indeed, the biggest challenge is to handle effects of the imbalance of power and globalization

towards achieving a more desirable outcome in terms of global security.

The debate about this leadership challenge emerged for a brief period in the 1940s, offering an important political and ideological distinction between 'Americanization' (unilateralism) and 'internationalism' (multilateralism). The brief moment of limited unipolarity *sans* globalization at that time and subsequent arrival of the Cold War eclipsed the debate—and with it the proponents of a more equitable global order. Sixty years down the line the issue is relevant again although in an entirely different framework of power equations, threats, and vulnerabilities.

### Globalization and Security

The role and responsibilities of state governments have been redefined by the winds of change brought about by globalization. The new global architecture is made up of regions, corporations, NGOs, and political movements with complex interactions and competing interests.<sup>2</sup> Governance of states has become more difficult, particularly where political systems are not robust. Governance of globalization itself is a daunting task, given its operation in economic, political, social, cultural, religious, environmental, and military realms. Many consider present day globalization as having three main realms—economic (liberalization), political (democratization), and cultural (universalization), with war and diplomacy included in the political exchanges. The concept of globalization is also a subject of ideological suspicion since it is bound intrinsically with the pattern of capitalist development. This is not to suggest that westernization is a pre-requisite, but to emphasize differences in cultural approaches. The quality and perceived fairness of this process impacts on the strategic environment in a variety of ways. To a large extent, the scope of economic and political globalization is being determined by progress made in the cultural exchange.<sup>3</sup> Further, the process is far more dynamic than any influences experienced in the Cold War period with no clear and standard patterns. Due to uneven response and performance at regional and sub-regional levels, forces of integration and exclusion are continually changing the context of global security. As Friedman has noted, "Globalization is everything and its opposite.

It can be incredibly empowering and incredibly coercive.... In a sense, the biggest threat to globalization today is globalization itself."<sup>4</sup>

While globalization has many different layers, it is the economic consideration that has dominated much of the debate. Many states have embraced the process with very tangible benefits, and the economic costs of being left out have been considered unacceptable by most. "Free markets" and "structural reforms" have been put forward as a panacea for success although governments now have a better understanding of the need for caution since globalization by itself does not guarantee a win-win situation. In the 1990s, increased emphasis on economic issues made the World Trade Organization (WTO) debate synonymous with globalization, squeezing out security considerations from the new framework.

Threats have also changed in form, context, and scope with references like transnational, asymmetric, and unconventional. There is a general consensus that vulnerabilities of members of the global village have increased with the availability of new tools and processes. Simultaneous tensions between fragmentation and integration as well as between localization and internationalization have dramatically changed the current environment. Traditional determinants of national power themselves provide inaccurate measure of vulnerabilities as globalization has exacerbated instability in different regions and dimensions. As a recent project study has noted, globalization aggravates transnational security threats, but the economic and other non-security aspects of globalization also pose a significant threat to internal security of many states. Such internal collapse can have significant consequences beyond mere regional instability by causing more strategic turbulence and subsequent conflict.<sup>5</sup>

U.S. defense strategy alternatives thus have recognized the emergence of new types of threats, <sup>6</sup> but priorities thus far have not been driven by such strategic considerations. The strategy of "shaping the international environments," conceived in the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 97, was emphasized in the security strategy issued by the Clinton administration before relinquishing office. The strategy called for encouraging democratization, open markets, free trade, and sustainable development; preventing conflict; countering potential regional aggressors; confronting new

threats; and steering international peace and stability operations.<sup>7</sup> The strategy acknowledged a clear link between national and international interests in this rapidly changing era but also highlighted inherent contradictions in the approach by making advancement of American values one of the guiding principles of engagement. Security in a globalized world was thus tied only to the American perspective, transnational threats not withstanding.

Policymakers in the U.S. have felt that inexorable trend of globalization supports the continued viability of a strategy of engagement.8 Engagement invariably has the attendant difficulty of level and selectivity, since the number of players, both state and non-state, prone to miscalculation has increased. This is because numerous superimposed layers of realms of globalization, aided by technology, enhance prospects of anonymity. Potential adversaries who are weaker can now exploit the additional space and avoid direct military confrontation, which makes low intensity conflict and terrorism more appealing. For any provocative action, the ability to retaliate quickly has been impaired, as options in different realms need to be enmeshed in a coherent strategy. This in turn has impacted on the quality of defensive posture where detection and response have assumed higher significance. The U.S. National Missile Defense plan, for example, is an indication of a trend that the U.S. considers compelling enough to act upon and thus renege commitments of the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty.

## Unipolarity and Its Impact

The United States emerged as the unparalleled sole superpower at the end of the Cold War. While various models suggesting inevitable balancing of this unipolarity were postulated, no such eventuality seems probable in the medium term, and the superpower is now regarded as the hyperpower (a term used initially by historian Ben J. Wattenberg in 1991)—having expanded her lead in economic, military, and political power. The rise of a near-peer competitor, at least till 2015, has been ruled out, <sup>9</sup> and strategic debate on the need to counter China is being used for future force structuring by offering a player on the 'plausible' axis.

Translation of unipolarity into power can be examined from different perspectives as numerous writings relate to power in specific contexts. Extrapolating some of these to the international scene, coercive power is of particular relevance in the context of globalization. Coercive power, like other forms of power, is a function of dependency<sup>10</sup> and U.S. leverage over participants of globalization has increased due to this form of power. Coercion, however, has limited influence over "irrational" actors since coercion takes into account some form of predictable behavior from the weaker party in the dependency equation. Such actors can be of serious concern as they pose substantial threats to global security. Overall, coercive power is not an unmitigated boon but also has significant political and material opportunity costs, <sup>11</sup> many of which can lead to instability through the forces of globalization.

To achieve and sustain superpower status is a daunting challenge and it would be imprudent to presume that having reached such dizzying heights, the sole superpower would refrain from using such status to promote her national interests. David Wilkinson has identified the current power configuration of the world system as unipolarity without hegemony, which is not inherently unstable.<sup>12</sup> Those who see a direct linkage between unipolarity and hegemony challenge this conception while acknowledging that hegemony relates more to power than to polarity. In all cases, the existence and execution of hegemony has been admitted, with different opinions about its impact. Hegemony itself has been defined as "a situation in which one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so." The theory of hegemonic stability, whereby co-operation and order depend upon perpetuation of hegemony, is flawed in the present-day context, as it does not take into account the interplay of forces of globalization. It discards multilateral co-operation multilateral institutions because of their historical track record. Hegemony also rests on deference of partners whose elite recognizes the benefits facilitated in the short term. Success is dependent, however, on the extent of recognition beyond the elites. The notion of a "benign hegemon" relates well to the stability theory but is not backed by any real-world experiences or long-term trends. In the absence of such recognition, with clear evidence of use of coercive power and due to deliberate marginalisation of multilateral institutions including the United Nations, the "benign

hegemon" theory of the primacist gets mired in naïveté. An unambiguous manifestation of unipolarity has also been witnessed in the context of the Balkans and continued operations in Iraq.

Outpaced by globalization, the United Nations has been weakened further by unipolarity which has made it appear outdated, outmoded, and in many cases irrelevant. Lack of reform has been cited as a major roadblock, and the American Enterprise Institute denounced the concept of multilateral approach in April 2000. In the run up to the Presidential elections in November 2000, Condoleezza Rice (the current U.S. National Security Advisor) formulated a resolute "'No' to the illusory international community."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the Clinton administration also appeared, in the end, to veer away from the once much touted approach of "aggressive" multilateralism.<sup>15</sup>

The present day hegemonic structure is often linked to economic expansion. It can be argued that unipolarity has facilitated the pace of globalization, and many countries have already reaped benefits through suitable adaptation. Viewed from the Marxist perspective, the foundations of the present day economic globalization were put in place by the United States soon after World War II. With effective control of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the U.S. took upon itself the burden of implied responsibility as a trade-off. Unipolarity facilitated this control but also highlighted tension in U.S. foreign policy characterized by a clear line between national and global interests. <sup>16</sup> Negative results of globalization, wherever experienced and for whatever reason, are therefore often blamed on the U.S. American economic expansion has thus become more controversial in the period of unipolarity as compared to the bipolar period. Many, as a direct result of U.S. stewardship of globalization, similarly view outcomes of neo-imperialism, cultural invasion, and violent backlashes in the name of religion. Unipolarity enhances undercurrents of dissatisfaction that are important in examining prospects of stability.

Unipolarity has also facilitated inclusion of value judgments in the scope of U.S. national interests, which in turn has given a value-laden spin to various strategies under consideration. Enshrining promotion of a set of values through coercion can force a 'return to roots' phenomenon, which Samuel P. Huntington terms as 'the growth of civilization consciousness.' It also heightens concerns that nations are unable to shape their own destiny, enabling many local leaders to exploit the situation by arousing popular sentiment through increased emphasis on religion in the interplay of politics. But above all, unipolarity provides a rallying point for those who seek to exploit these vulnerabilities. It therefore follows that while globalization has increased threats of new forms of warfare, unipolarity increases the probability of occurrence.

Isaiah Berlin, in his writings of the 1970s and 1980s, refuted the notion of rational organization of a perfect global society along the lines suggested by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's "Utopianism," but also warned against dramatizing the incompatibility of values among different cultures, claiming that "to judge one culture by the standards of another argues a failure of imagination and understanding."18 Wounded cultural consciousness seeks to assert itself in an aggressive fashion, which is a common response of nations looked down upon with arrogant contempt. Berlin emphasized that "pluralism—the incommensurability and, at times, incompatibility of objective ends—is *not* relativism; nor, *a fortiori*, subjectivism, nor the allegedly unbridgeable differences of emotional attitude....<sup>19</sup> He also recognized that while humanity does not, and cannot, march with an even step, our hope must rest on a genuine progress towards an international order, based on a recognition that we inhabit one common world.<sup>20</sup>

## The New Amalgam

Hegemonic influences in global polity, global economy, and global idealization are unequal in intent as well as effectiveness, although no layer is immune from it. Globalization necessitates engagement whose parameters are determined by the power structure of the world. And since hegemony tends towards coercive engagement, its continuation coalesces as well as conflicts with different layers of globalization simultaneously. Efforts to manage these diverse trends yield nominal results, and unevenness in the impact of globalization gets accentuated. This is not to say that globalization would increase even more under bipolarity or multipolarity, but distortion through unchallenged coercion could be significantly higher.

Thus, despite the significant lead of the United States in power, there is a discreet emergence of counter coercive strategies, with increased likelihood of their usage.<sup>21</sup> The strategy of chaos relates to cultural globalization or progressive 'culturalization' of social life. It is important, however to underscore that there is a strong and durable link between international political economy and security, and that new tensions are representative of the effects of a global political economy organized along neo-liberal lines under hegemonic influence. These overwhelming currents are the cause of what is commonly referred to as 'asymmetrical warfare' wherein tools facilitated by globalization can be used to exploit vulnerabilities of an otherwise 'secure and impregnable' power. Application of this form of warfare is, however, not restricted to the superpower alone, and may well be directed at other states and/or non-state actors who may be at different levels of integration in the globalization process.

Globalization in itself is not self-regulating and a case is often made for the need of a military-territorial power to adjudicate when competing coalitions pull in different directions. Aggressive unilateralism rests on the consideration that changes in the nature of issues confronting states and societies should be guided to shape the environment. The argument, however, detaches itself from societal impulses generated by discord over submission to an abstract, shifting 'common good' determined by a hegemon and increased emphasis on reconciliation through direct or implied warnings rather than through accommodation. While countries are expected to become less regulatory by easing controls within, they are required to operate under a hegemonic external environment which is at least predictable. It would be naïve to presume that regions, countries, and non-state actors perceive the hegemon as 'shaping the international security environment.' Favourable public posturing to such suggestions can be regarded as nothing more than admission of a fait accompli. Risks to global security are increased through this manifestation as national interests of states are seen to be aligning to the process of globalization at different pace. These risks take a non-territorial form, although territory can become central to their expression.

Richard N. Haas makes a distinction between "United States as a sheriff" and "United States as a policeman," 22 calling for reduced

coercion, regulating the new paradigm of deregulation, and moving away from hegemony as a declared objective. Inadequacies in handling ever-increasing complexities of globalization through a unilateral approach are also becoming apparent. Multiple concerns in a more loose global architecture can move towards conflict if prescription is chosen as the main plank of policy. The future of globalization is inextricably linked to the management of alienation, as indeed is security. This linkage underscores that proper management of globalization is a national interest of the United States, and a role from which America should not shrink.<sup>23</sup>

It seems unlikely that security environment in the medium term will in anyway approximate the clarity of the Cold War period. Inherent contradictions between unipolarity and globalization further blur the path to achieve consistency between broader goals of international stability and national interests. Despite elegant rationalization, declared objectives like retaining unimpeded access to a region through use of force if required, come into conflict with the aim of supporting an international system based on the rule of law by punishing unwarranted behavior of a defaulting state. Making virtue of expediency is a predictable outcome of unilateralism and can in itself become the underlying cause of increased instability. And globalization increases the potential of increased application of this condition.

The era of globalization is also characterized by the need of coalitions on all issues of international importance, as coalitions are perceived to lend legitimacy to a selected course of action. For any intervention or crisis response, the focus invariably shifts to a speedy build-up of the coalition (to include willing as well as unwilling partners), with little or no involvement of partners in examining policy alternatives. Many come aboard in anticipation of reward, and coalitions therefore often indicate approaching public agenda from private perspectives instead of environment-shaping through common norms and collective sense of purpose. The costs of staying out of a coalition are too high in a globalized economy and polity, with pressing concerns usurping considerations of a better future strategic environment.

#### Responding to the Challenge

#### Towards Multilateralism

Influences of globalization need to be taken into account in development of security strategies wherein national elites would need to show flexibility in looking beyond state-centric perceptions and positions. New vulnerabilities and increased transnational threats require enlightened cohesion, which can come about only through mutual adjustment. Collaboration and regulation through an agreed set of norms and goals should take precedence over traditional approaches, where the international system is aggressively exploited for individual purpose of the state.

A hegemonic approach to shaping the security environment can be inadequate at best and counter-productive at worst. Putative as well as actualized coercive powers can have disproportionate costs in the emerging environment. Nations should not look at the United States for management of each and every crisis situation and should evolve towards mutually agreed upon response mechanisms. This counterbalance should not be seen in terms of a power equation, but more as a collaborative action to regulate security influences of globalization. The United States on its part should attempt to bring into balance the aims of pre-emptive containment and enhanced co-operation. Facile formulations suggesting short-term gains should be dropped in favor of alternatives with better prospects of enduring stability.

Co-operation with contenders to manage hegemony was used effectively after the emergence of new post-war power structure in 1815, 1919, and 1945. However, those models differ from the present since the outcome of wars then was not unipolarity. <sup>24</sup> This dissimilarity has prompted unilateralists to call for maintaining America's freedom of action abroad and opposing organizations, such as the UN, that threaten to limit the country's sovereignty. Such an approach, nonetheless, fails to recognize that lack of devolution also results in the hegemon assuming burden of framing and maintaining international order, which in the era of globalization is beyond the capabilities of any one nation. The more a hegemon undercuts legitimacy and effectiveness of international organizations in a globalized world, the more inequitable and unstable will globalization become. Checks on opportunism offered

by unipolarity can only be provided by a multilateral approach, which would simultaneously constrain behavior of other nations.<sup>25</sup>

# A New Framework Monitored by the United Nations

Global restructuring as a result of accelerated connectivity would inevitably include efforts by various players to increase influence in different realms. Adverse effects of these efforts on global security can be diminished through a security regulatory framework adapted by the global community.

Since the founding of the United Nations, major powers have tended to use it to provide legitimacy to individual foreign policy objectives while minor powers have wanted to use it to counterbalance hegemony. It is true that global norms for security seem utopian even to staunch liberals, but it is also true that we need to move beyond "strategic vision" determined purely by aggressive pursuit of national interests. If one common set of norms for security is to be rejected, there can be little optimism in any growth of the human consciousness towards a better world.

Shaping of the future security environment should be addressed under the auspices of the United Nations where strategies for handling new types of multidisciplinary threats should be evolved. These strategies may take different form in different regions of the world. Other multilateral institutions should be strengthened to improve management of globalization, with the United States providing assistance in establishing a regulatory framework. Shaping the global security environment should not be seen as a national interest of the United States alone nor should it be enunciated as such. The sweeping winds of globalization make all states stakeholders in global security as much as in global economy, and require them to look beyond mere interdependence. If global security is to be pursued objectively, the international community must take into account potential risks as well as insecurities that grievously afflict peoples around the world. Legal and practical limitations of the United Nations should not become an excuse for unilateral action or intervention by "posse." A necessary adjustment of the UN charter (such as in the case of Article 2.7, which expressly forbids the United Nations from intervening in matters "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any

state") and framework should be undertaken instead. Amendments to article 2.7—as per proposals submitted by the Special Commission in January 1996<sup>26</sup>—with the UN acting as an effective arbiter, need to be implemented. There is also a pressing need to cultivate a structure in which governments and NGOs can face complex challenges together.<sup>27</sup>

#### Conclusion

While the United States, in the eyes of many, has no history of imperialism or expansionist designs, aggressive unilateralism has become the norm as a consequence of unipolarity and hegemony. Increased coercion resulting from unipolarity aggravates tensions generated by mixed and uneven patterns of globalization. The ongoing debate on merits of this approach underscores the policy dilemmas being faced in shaping future security environment and maintaining leadership. In the rapidly changing environment, complexities and spillover effects of different realms of globalization have changed the very nature of the security challenge.

Galvanising nationalism and dissent have become easier with the consequent increase in new forms of threat. And the co-existence of unipolarity and globalization has only increased risks to security as conflicts may continue to erupt with increased frequency. Unipolarity promotes but distorts globalization, and globalization accentuates negative consequences of unipolarity. Unilateralism locks a hegemon in a paradigm that sharpens the dividing line, forcing challengers to devise new ways to breach this line. Blurring this dividing line through devolution and multilateralism is essential to improving the security environment in the globalized world. An expanded security framework, with an increased role of multilateral institutions including the United Nations, can significantly diminish the probability of globalization turning pernicious. Collective efforts to improve global security would serve the world as well as U.S. interests in the future, as compared to aggressive efforts to extend the moment of unipolarity. It is the promotion of global norms and pluralism that ought to be at the heart of any globalization strategy.

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